



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

OFFICE OF DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

9 May 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR: General Maxwell D. Taylor

SUBJECT : Cuban Operation

1. At about 9:30 p.m. on 16 April (D-1) I was called in the CIA headquarters for the Cuban operation by the Special Assistant to the President, Mr. McGeorge Bundy. He notified me that we would not be permitted to launch air strikes the next morning until they could be conducted from a strip within the beachhead. Any further consultation regarding this matter should be with the Secretary of State.
2. I called the Secretary and asked him if I could come immediately to his office and discuss this decision. Mr. Bissell joined me at the Secretary's office where we both arrived at about 10:15 p.m.
3. The Secretary informed us that there were political considerations preventing the planned air strikes before the beachhead airfield was in our hands and usable. The air strikes on D-2 had been allowed because of military considerations. Political requirements at the present time were overriding. The main consideration involved the situation at the United Nations. The Secretary described Ambassador Stevenson's attitude in some detail. Ambassador Stevenson had insisted essentially that the air strikes would make it absolutely impossible for the U. S. position to be sustained. The Secretary stated that such a result was unacceptable.
4. In the light of this he asked that we describe the implications of the decision. We told him that the time was such (now almost 11:00 p.m.) that it was now physically impossible to stop the over-all landing operation

as the convoy was at that time just about beginning to put the first boat ashore, and that failure to make air strikes in the immediate beach-head area the first thing in the morning (D-Day) would clearly be disastrous. I informed him that there would be four effects of the cancellation order as it applied to strikes against Cuban airfields.

a. There would be a great risk of loss of one or more of the ships as they withdrew from the beach. This would be serious but not catastrophic, provided that the unloading had proceeded as scheduled and all planned unloading had occurred by daylight. In view of the fact that this was a night landing and close timing was required, it was pointed out that the probability of smooth performance here was doubtful. (As it turned out, the unloading was not accomplished in the time planned.)

b. The disembarked forces in the beachhead would be subjected to a heavier scale of air attack than would otherwise have been the case. In view of the fact that the Cuban Air Force was inadequate for massive air attacks, the attacks to be expected under the new circumstances would be damaging to these forces but not decisive.

c. Failure essentially to neutralize the Cuban Air Force very early on D-Day would have its most serious effect on the use of the Expeditionary Air Force's B-26s to isolate the battlefield. The B-26s were being counted upon to attack approaching Cuban ground and Naval elements and close-in artillery and tanks. No fighter cover was being provided for the B-26s and they would thus face the prospect of serious attrition during these battlefield operations. The beachhead could then be overwhelmed by the superior surface attack which could be brought against it.


d. Loss of efficiency would result from this late change of orders.

5. After considering the foregoing, the Secretary of State agreed that strikes could be made in the immediate beachhead area but confirmed that the planned air strikes against Cuban airfields, a harbor, and a radio broadcasting station, could not be permitted and the decision to cancel would stand. He asked if I should like to speak to the President. Mr. Bissell and I were impressed with the extremely delicate situation with Ambassador Stevenson and the United Nations and the risk to the entire

political position of the United States, and the firm position of the Secretary. We saw no point in my speaking personally to the President and so informed the Secretary.

6. Our immediate problem then was quickly to dispatch the necessary order to the Air Base in Puerto Cabezas carrying out the instructions to stop the planned air strike and to require re-planning and re-briefing of crews. (This was barely accomplished as the order to cancel caught the crews in their cockpits.)

7. Our next task was to try and compensate for the loss of effective air strikes. In order to protect the shipping as it withdrew from the beachhead, I arranged with the Navy to stand by pending authority to give fighter cover. At 4:30 a.m., 17 April (D-Day), I called on the Secretary of State at his home and reiterated the need to protect the shipping. The Secretary telephoned the President and put me on the phone. After I made the request the President asked that the Secretary be put back on. After conversation with the President, the Secretary informed me that the request for air cover was disapproved.



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The foregoing conforms to my recollection:



RICHARD M. BISSELL, Jr.  
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